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ABSTRACT

Arguing that the decline in the number of community college students transferring to four-year colleges could have a more dramatic effect on baccalaureate-granting institutions than the projected drop in the number of high school graduates, this paper traces the history of the community college's transfer function and discusses the implications of its decline for four-year colleges. The paper first discusses three factors which, since 1950, have weakened transfer education: efforts to expand access to postsecondary education and the admission of students without the interest or ability to complete baccalaureate programs; the growing number of continuing education students pursuing personal interests rather than degree goals; and the growing curricular emphasis on vocational programs. The impact of these trends on transfer programs is then examined in terms of declining enrollments, undermined teacher morale, and the increased difficulty of maintaining college-parallel curricula. After noting the need for studies to achieve a more precise, localized picture of the changing transfer function and the reverse transfer phenomenon, the paper discusses the effects of declines in transferring students on four-year institutions, especially in terms of the need to admit and provide courses for more freshman students. Finally, the implications of these trends and possibilities for postsecondary educational planning are discussed. (JP)

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FROM JUNIOR COLLEGES TO COMMUNITY COLLEGES: THE EFFECT ON FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS

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From Junior Colleges to Community Colleges:

The Effect on Four-Year Institutions

Gerald R. Kissler

Much has been written about the effect of lower birth rates and a declining number of high school graduates on enrollment in post-secondary education. Those of us in post-secondary institutions take this very seriously. Marketing seminars are being held in many large cities, recruitment plans are being developed, and a recent survey (Beal and Noel, 1979) indicates that approximately 80% of all colleges and universities have conducted or plan to conduct a study of retention. However, too little attention has been given to the second major source of new undergraduate students -- community college transfers.

Today's community college differs from the junior college of the past. Over the last quarter century the vocational and community education functions of two-year colleges grew at a much faster rate than the transfer function. During this period the names of many of these institutions were changed from "junior colleges" to "community colleges" to reflect the broader nature of their mission, recognizing that the community colleges were more than just "farm teams" for the baccalaureate degree-granting institutions in the "major leagues." These changes went largely unnoticed by those of us in four-year institutions, because the growth in vocational and community education programs came on top of a stable, if not increasing, transfer program. However, we are now beginning to see the first signs of what has been called the decline of transfer education (Lombardi, 1979). A continuation of present trends could have a much more dramatic effect on baccalaureate degree-granting institutions than the projected decline in the number of high school graduates. Therefore, we must develop a better understanding of the changes that are taking place in our local community colleges.

The Evolution of the Comprehensive Community College

The Original Concept

The junior colleges had three important missions:

1) vocational training,
2) community education and
3) preparation of students for transfer to four-year institutions to complete the baccalaureate.

The State of California took the lead in developing terminal vocational programs for young people between 18 and 21 (Deutsch, Douglass and Strayer, 1948). Some of the earliest vocational programs included photography, radio, agriculture, home economics and hotel management. Under the broad category of "community or adult education" the junior colleges offered non-credit recreational, cultural and vocational courses to meet the needs of those who were beyond the traditional college-going age. However, the emphasis was on the transfer function, as the term "junior college" implied. One quarter of a century ago, Grace Bird (1956) wrote

> Although "preparation for advanced study" is only one of the purposes of junior-college education, it is one of the oldest of the functions and the one best known to the general public. The very term junior college seems to underscore the importance of this purpose. Some educators think this purpose has been underscored so heavily as to impede proper recognition of other important services such as vocational and community education.

The basic philosophy was that junior college students, including many who would not have been eligible for admission to a four-year institution at high school graduation, could complete the first two years of equivalent, but not necessarily identical, courses and then transfer to a four-year institution to complete the baccalaureate.

Expanded Access

Throughout the 1950's and 1960's the goal of junior college educators was to broaden access; not only to accommodate the growing number of high school graduates who were the products of the post-World War II baby boom, but also to provide at least some college education for those individuals who in the past had not traditionally gone to college. They succeeded. Over the past twenty-five years, the number of community and junior colleges doubled, and extension centers were started in communities that did not have a local community college. Low-cost community college programs became available in most communities, and enrollment increased by a factor of six.

These actions increased access to local community colleges, but did not produce a proportionate increase in the numbers of students transferring to baccalaureate degree-granting institutions. As the community and junior

colleges cast their nets more widely, they reached more who lacked the motivation, interest or ability to complete a baccalaureate program.

Even though large numbers of students continued to enter the community colleges with the intent to transfer, relatively few actually did. This led Burton Clark (1960) to describe the "cooling-out" process, in which the "overaspiring student" is reoriented rather than dismissed. Twenty years later Clark (1980) summarized his concept by saying "Crucial components of the process that were stressed in the original statement and that I would want to emphasize even more now are that: a) alternatives are provided -- the person who is to be denied a desired goal is offered a substitute; and b) aspiration is reduced in a 'soft' consoling way, easing the pain and frustration of not being able to achieve one's first goal and the difficulties involved in switching to and learning to value the offered alternative education and career." Because the community and junior colleges absorbed a substantial portion of the increasing number of high school graduates in the 1960's and performed the "cooling-out" function, universities in many states were permitted to focus their attention on upper division and graduate level programs -- a mutually satisfactory relationship.

A Broader Concept of Community Education

During this period the growth of other community college functions exceeded that of the transfer programs. As the average age of the general population increased, so did the demand for continuing education. The earlier distinction between the community education offerings for "adults" and the vocational or transfer programs for recent high school graduates broke down as more older students came to the community college for vocational training or to pursue the baccalaureate. The term "life-long learning" came into vogue. A broader concept of community education evolved to include the use of "transfer" and "vocational" credit courses by students with a personal interest in the subject matter but no intention to complete a formal program, as well as non-credit adult education offerings and non-credit remedial academic courses.

By 1976 as many students were enrolled in non-credit as credit courses (Brawer, 1980). In fact, the non-credit enrollments would have considerably exceeded the credit enrollments if California figures had been reported in the same manner as those of other states. In discussing the fact that only about 10% of the community college enrollment in California is in "adult" or non-credit courses, Lombardi (1978) said "The small number of adults reported reflects both the continued predominance of the secondary schools in adult education and the colleges' tendencies to classify as many courses as possible as credit rather than as adult, because credit classes receive higher state support than adult."

Within the broader community education concept a wide variety of non-credit lectures, short-courses and other programs were offered on such topics as parenting, cooking, real estate investing, sculpting and hiking. The enrollment in non-credit remedial academic courses also increased significantly during this period. Expanded access to those who were not eligible to attend a baccalaureate degree-granting institution, encouragement to bring high

school drop-outs back into the educational system and the general decline in the level of academic preparation in high schools across the country have all contributed to the growth of "basic skills" courses in community and junior colleges.

As more older students attended the community colleges, they began to use many of the credit courses for their own personal enrichment. As Cohen and Lombardi (1979) put it:

> The transfer courses have become discrete. Many students already have baccalaureate degrees and are taking the 'transfer' course in photography to gain access to the darkroom, the 'transfer' course in art to have their paintings criticized, the 'transfer' course in a language so that they can travel abroad.

While the proportion of these "non-traditional" students enrolled in credit courses remained low, there probably was very little effect on "transfer" courses. The regular faculty continued to teach a baccalaureate-equivalent course, which met the needs of the transfer students. After all, the "non-traditional" students could always skip the classes or ignore assignments that were not consistent with their personal interests. But, what happens when the majority of students in an evening "transfer" course are enrolled for personal enrichment? Are the somewhat different interests of these "non-traditional" students likely to lead to changes in the content of the course and the nature of the assignments, particularly if the instructor is a part-time faculty member?

The Growth of Vocational Programs

Vocational programs were also expanded, as Federal and State categorical funds were appropriated specifically for this purpose. Student interest swelled as the wages for service trades that did not require the baccalaureate increased significantly and as student perceptions of the relative value of the baccalaureate changed. As a result the percentage of community college students enrolled in occupational courses rose from 13% in 1965 to approximately 30% in 1970 to nearly 50% in 1976 (Brawer, 1978).

Some of these students enter the community college with a strong vocational goal and a commitment to complete the program required for a specific job (e.g., dental assistant). Some plan only to take a few vocational courses (e.g., secretarial skills) that will help them to move quickly into the labor market. Others already have a job and take vocational courses that will help them to gain a promotion or to change careers. Another group enrolls in vocational courses in the community college (e.g., business and engineering) and will probably transfer to another college or university to complete the baccalaureate. Vocational courses are not all like welding and auto mechanics, although there has clearly been substantial growth in these non-baccalaureate level programs. The task of determining who is enrolled for what reasons is far from simple. Regardless of how the figures are categorized, one cannot escape the conclusion that there has been tremendous growth in enrollment in vocational courses.

Over the past twenty-five years the junior colleges evolved into comprehensive community colleges. Enrollment in vocational and community education offerings increased dramatically; access was expanded to students with "basic skills" deficiencies; and part-time enrollment became the norm. More than 60% of the 4.5 million community college students taking courses for credit are now enrolled part-time. Most of these vocational, community education, part-time and "basic skills" students are not likely to transfer to baccalaureate degree-granting institutions.

The Effect on Transfer Programs

What happened to the transfer program, which was once the dominant function of the junior colleges, during this period of expanded access? It also grew during the 1960's, but at a much slower rate than the community education and vocational functions. As a result, the transfer function began to represent a smaller proportion of the total program of the community colleges than it had before, but it continued to be a very important function to the community colleges and to the baccalaureate degree-granting institutions that depended upon a large number of transfer students to maintain their enrollment.

From the early 1970's to the present, however, both the absolute number and the proportion of students in community college transfer programs have declined in many states (Lombardi, 1979). The combination of the tremendous growth of community education and vocational programs, declining enrollments in transfer programs, and budgetary difficulties has had an effect on instructors and the curriculum in liberal arts programs.

Today, more than 50% of community college faculty are employed on a part-time basis. It is not uncommon for members of some liberal arts departments to wonder if one of their fellow faculty members who resigns, retires or dies will be replaced by a vocational teacher or a part-time instructor. Faculty morale has also been affected by the successful efforts to expand access, which have greatly increased the heterogeneity of the student body. The community colleges have pointed with pride to their ability to teach students who were admissible to baccalaureate degree-granting institutions, as well as those who were not eligible, to ease the transition for older students who were returning to college, to help others to upgrade their vocational skills and to provide others with the opportunities for life-long learning. Heterogeneity, which was once their greatest strength, may now be their greatest weakness. For such a wide diversity of student interests and abilities in the classroom makes an instructor's task extremely difficult. Cohen and Lombardi (1979) summarized the effects of increasing numbers of low-achieving students on faculty and student morale by saying

> Teaching remedial students can be overwhelming for faculty, many of whom are academically and emotionally unprepared (and often unsympathetic). High-aptitude students, discouraged by large numbers of slow learners, gravitate toward other colleges in the same district or out of the community colleges entirely.

In a recent national survey (Brawer and Friedlander, 1979) 53% of the faculty felt that their science or social science course would have been more effective if their students had been better prepared to handle the requirements of the course. Increasing heterogeneity and an overall decline in the level of academic preparation of entering students may be eroding our continuing efforts to maintain an equivalent lower division curriculum. Formal articulation agreements between community colleges and baccalaureate degree-granting institutions are usually based upon the general subject matter of the course but do not insure that the level of text, the nature of student assignments or the standards for assigning grades are equivalent. There is some evidence that, despite formal articulation agreements, these types of differences do exist and that they are associated with differences between the academic performance of community college transfers and "native" freshmen who become juniors at baccalaureate degree-granting insitutions (Kissler, Lara and Cardinal, 1981; Russell and Perez, 1980).

Further evidence of changes in the liberal arts curriculum can be found in a series of studies conducted by the Center for the Study of Community Colleges in Los Angeles. In the final monograph in the series, Brawer (1980) concluded that the role of the liberal arts in the community colleges has been eroded. In the humanities, which we usually consider to be the very heart of a liberal education, three disturbing trends were reported:

1) Enrollment in humanities courses has declined.

2) The humanities departments in many community colleges, using the NEH rubric, are frequently limited to little more than political science, history and literature.

3) The range of courses offered by humanities departments in community colleges is very narrow.

Brawer (1978) summarized this by saying that "students in colleges with fewer than 7,500 students rarely have an opportunity to study anything specialized." In discussing the breakdown of the classical, coherent and planned liberal arts program, Cohen and Lombardi (1979) concluded:

> On paper the university parallel programs remain intact; but the transfer function was a marked casualty of the 1970's . . . Few students take (traditional courses) in sequence even though the college may recommend sequences and list course prerequisites. They declare a major or enter a formal program if required to do so but they use the community college for their own purposes.

Certainly, this is not the picture in every community college across the nation, but the pattern is disturbing to those of us in community colleges and baccalaureate degree-granting institutions who are concerned about the academic preparation and retention of transfer students.

The Need for Local Studies

Broad generalizations about trends in community college programs across the nation are useful indicators of change, but we need to have much better information about the colleges in our own states and local regions if we are to develop realistic plans for the 1980's. Who are the students in our community colleges? Why are they there? How many plan to transfer to a baccalaureate degree-granting institution; how many will; and why is there such a difference between the two?

Such a study is being conducted in California by Steve Sheldon and Russell Hunter. The Statewide Longitudinal Study (Sheldon and Hunter, 1980) has already produced some startling findings:

1) 57% of first-time students in California Community Colleges are enrolled in at least one vocational course.

2) The modal number of courses taken is one and the mean is about three.

3) The modal number of courses completed was zero. Approximately one-half of the students enrolled in liberal arts courses did not complete them (c.f., Friedlander, 1981).

4) 40% of the students plan to attend "occasionally."

5) Most students enroll to pursue a particular academic or personal interest and do not care about the grade or credit they receive for the course.

In discussing these findings with other chief executive officers of community colleges in Southern California, Chancellor Leslie Koltai of the Los Angeles Community College District (1980) concluded:

> Regardless of what we see our educational role to be -- and regardless of what the mission statement says -- our students are doing what they want to do -- and we had better realize it. We had better see the conflict between our assumptions and reality. We are going to have to deal with the myth of community college education -- and we're going to have to find the realistic basis upon which to construct our future. There is a tremendous number of students who come to us -- not to win a degree or certificate of completion -- not to upgrade their job skills -- not even to broaden their understanding of general academic subjects. They come to us because they want to learn how to fix their carburetor, or how to refinish their desk, or how to repair the air conditioning equipment in their homes.

Although enrollments in California's Community Colleges account for one-fourth of the U.S. enrollments, one should not necessarily conclude that the findings of the Statewide Longitudinal Study in California are representative of the community and junior colleges in other states.

California's no-tuition policy has undoubtedly contributed to these findings, but it would be wrong to assume that similar trends have not affected other states. Through cooperative studies including representatives from both community colleges and baccalaureate degree-granting institutions, we must begin to seek answers to questions about the faculty, students and curriculum in the community colleges in our local areas. For, the answers to these questions could have a dramatic impact on our plans for post-secondary education in the 1980's.

The Effect on Four-Year Institutions

The cumulative effect of these trends over the past twenty-five years has been changes in the students, faculty and curriculum of the community colleges. The result has been a shift in the balance among the three missions of the community colleges, with less emphasis on liberal arts programs and the transfer function. Now, the effect is also being felt by four-year institutions as the number of transfers from community colleges in some states has begun to decline (Lombardi, 1979). For example, the number of transfers from the California Community Colleges to the University of California has declined by more than 30% in the last seven years. Transfers to the California State University and Colleges system declined by 10% over that same period. In fact, the University of California now sends more students to the Community Colleges than they send to the University (Kissler, 1980). It is true that more than one-half of them had already completed the baccalaureate and were pursuing a particular academic or personal interest, but that is just the point. Many community college students today are pursuing a particular academic or personal interest and are not concerned about the grade or credit they receive for the course.

In response to the declining number of community college transfer students and an increased number of applicants from high school, the baccalaureate degree-granting institutions in several states are admitting more students as freshmen.* If this were to continue over the next few years, a serious downward spiral could develop. For, as the baccalaureate degree-granting institutions admit more students directly from high school, the best students in the state will be removed from the community college classrooms. This could lower the norm for grading purposes, the level of the text that could be used and the amount of material that could be covered in the class. When combined with the narrowing of the curriculum and the heterogeneity of the student body mentioned earlier, this could produce a decline in the quality of preparation of transfer students. Therefore, the bacca-

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* Lombardi (1979) provides evidence that the number of transfers from community colleges to four-year institutions has declined in California, Florida and Washington. Unfortunately, many states have not been reporting historical figures on the number of community college transfers. Therefore, institutional research officers at universities in eighteen states were contacted to provide additional information for this report. Some could not separate the number of community college transfers from the number of transfers from other four-year institutions to their university. Six of the ten institutions (California, Florida, Washington, Missouri, Massachusetts, and Kansas) that provided data, reported a general trend toward fewer community college transfers and more freshmen entrants. The trend was not reported in Arizona or Texas where the number of community college transfers has remained at high levels. Neither was a decline reported in Michigan or Ohio, but there are very few comprehensive community colleges in these states and the overwhelming majority of new students at baccalaureate degree-granting institutions are admitted as freshmen.

laureate degree-granting institutions would tend to admit even fewer transfers and more freshmen, etc.

The decline in the number of community college transfers to baccalaureate degree-granting institutions in the state of Florida has been a major cause of concern at the four universities that have only upper division and graduate programs. Proposals now before the State Legislature would permit these institutions to establish lower division programs. Needless to say, this has placed a tremendous amount of political pressure on the community colleges in Florida.

In response, efforts are now underway at Miami-Dade Community College to strengthen the liberal arts and transfer programs. Caught between an open access admission policy and pressures to increase access at a time of declining levels of academic preparation in the high schools, Miami-Dade chose to require all students in degree programs to demonstrate minimum proficiency in reading, writing and computational skills. They also began diagnostic testing to help students determine their own strengths and weaknesses, instituted mandatory advising, created new general education requirements to add enrichment courses to those needed to develop basic "survival" or "coping" skills, and established standards for academic progress (Lukenbill and McCabe, 1978). These actions have not been taken without some cost. In the last three years nearly 8,000 students have been suspended or dismissed for not making normal progress. However, the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) students has not declined because the number of courses taken by those students who are still enrolled has increased. The February 2, 1981 issue of the Chronicle of Higher Education quotes Miami-Dade President Robert H. McCabe as saying:

> The combination of lower entering skills and the need for strong academic standards has created a situation where community colleges, especially, are set up for failure. Unless we begin to adopt some reasonable policies, the open door is not going to remain open much longer. If we are successful (with the programs that have been implemented), I think we will have more students completing a full two-year academic program. Before, anybody could stay in the system as long as they wanted and wander all over the curriculum with little direction, if any. I think that practice has not been helpful to anyone.

What will the future hold for other community coleges? Some feel that the cumulative effects of all of the factors mentioned in this paper and the budgetary problems in most states mean that many community colleges will lose their comprehensive mission and become essentially vocational/technical colleges (Breneman and Clark, 1980). On the other hand, Lombardi (1978) feels that the transfer function will not disappear even though "the decline of transfer enrollment and transfers to senior institutions will continue for the next five years." I find it difficult to make generalizations about the future of community colleges across the nation because the colleges and the communities they serve vary so widely. The trends affecting California, Washington and Florida have not affected all other states to the same degree. For all practical purposes, however, there already is no transfer program at some community colleges, and many

of the rest are approaching a crucial crossroad.

The following portion of a letter from one faculty member exemplifies the nature of the debate that is being conducted in many community colleges in California:

> Thirty years ago we had a clientele with a probable I.Q. of 100-130. We had motivated students, we had achievers, we had doers. Today we have a marginal, incapacitated clientele. That's reality' You have to face it and deal with it. One can't pretend that it does not exist. Non-readers, non-thinkers, non-motivated students are customers. The majority are incapable of a four-year education, and those who deny this conclusion are doing these marginal students a disservice . . . . In short, after all the verbage that remains unread, it is your job to decide on a policy. Once and for all: are we an academic institution or are we a vocational institution?

Some community colleges will, for all practical purposes, become vocational institutions. Further budgetary problems and changes in student interest will prevent them from offering the breadth and quality of courses to adequately prepare students for transfer to baccalaureate degree-granting institutions. Others, like Miami-Dade, will respond to the challenge by strengthening the transfer function. The majority of community colleges will probably steer some middle course, attempting to remain a comprehensive community college but with a continuing change in the relative emphasis on transfer, vocational and community education programs. If present trends continue, transfer programs will probably become smaller. On the other hand, if Federal support for vocational programs is reduced or if local funding difficulties result in a reduction in the number of part-time faculty, who frequently teach vocational and community education courses, the proportion of the total community college effort dedicated to the transfer function could increase.

Baccalaureate degree-granting institutions will not be unaffected by the outcome. Therefore, we need to become more aware of factors influencing the community colleges in our local areas. We must initiate new efforts to improve communication and articulation among our institutions within a spirit of cooperation. If we find evidence of a decline of transfer education, we should not necessarily interpret it as a failure on the part of our local community colleges, but attempt to understand it within the context of locally funded and administered colleges responding to changing community needs. Neither should community college educators react defensively, accusing the baccalaureate degree-granting institutions of stealing their students or of having unrealistic expectations for the transfer function. Little purpose will be served by blaming each other for trends over which we have had little, if any, control.

However, we cannot afford to ignore those trends, for the changes in the community colleges could be far more important to universities than the projected decline in the number of high school graduates. The Carnegie Council (1980) predicts that the decline in the number of high school

graduates will have the least effect on university enrollments. However, if there are further declines in the community college transfer function, the total enrollments of the universities may remain stable but the mix of students will contain more freshmen and sophomores, with fewer juniors and seniors. This will increase demand for lower division courses and will create the need to reallocate resources. Coupled with the decline in the levels of academic preparation in our high schools, the admission of more freshmen will lead to further enrollment increases in lower division mathematics and English composition courses. Given the decline in graduate enrollments in these fields, it may be difficult for some departments to find enough qualified graduate students to staff the increasing number of lower division discussion sections.

A substantial decline in transfer education with a significant increase in the numbers of lower division students in the baccalaureate degree-granting institutions of some states would also lead to a change in the nature of the "cooling-out" function. The faculty and counselors of a comprehensive community college can redirect low-achieving students to a wide variety of remedial and vocational programs within the same institution. However, these other options are not readily available in baccalaureate degree-granting institutions, and are not likely to become so in the near future. Therefore, the "softer" reorientation process would have to be replaced by greater stress on admission and dismissal standards. In addition to the obvious psychological consequences for the students involved, this would run counter to our general public policy toward expanding access and increasing retention.

We began with a discussion of the original concept of students spending two years in a junior college and then transferring to a four-year institution to complete the baccalaureate. We have seen how things have changed so that relatively few community college students transfer after completing their lower division program in two years. With the tremendous expansion of vocational and community education courses many students at four-year institutions, who may or may not already have the baccalaureate, are transferring to community colleges.* We need to know much more about these "reverse transfers," and we must recognize that our concept of articulation cannot be limited to the flow of students from community colleges to baccalaureate-degree granting institutions. There are also a large number of students who transfer from one baccalaureate degree-granting institution to another, and there is some indication that the numbers are increasing. With continuing discussions about a "core curriculum" and little agreement about what it means, can we be assured that these other types of transfer students are well served by our programs and policies?

Serious matters of educational policy are before us. We must be aware of the trends in our local areas, so that new plans can be developed for our futures based upon the realities of the present and not the hopes and dreams of the past.

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* Preliminary data from the Statewide Longitudinal Study in California indicate that approximately one-half of the "reverse transfers" did so for personal enrichment reasons, with the remainder split between those who plan to transfer back to a four-year institution and those who plan to enter the labor market.

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